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## **Report gives SoCal B for crime, F for transit**

**By Robert Jablon**  
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LOS ANGELES – Southern California gets good marks for holding down crime and poverty but traffic jams merit an F grade and threaten its economic future, according to an annual report card released Thursday by a regional planning agency.

The “State of the Region” study for 2006 examined Southern California's quality of life, based on 2005 statistics. It gave the region B grades for employment and safety, Cs for income and air quality, Ds for housing and education.

The report card looked at an area that includes Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura and Imperial counties and 187 cities. Overall, the region ranks as the 10th largest economy in the world.

Most grades were unchanged or only slightly lower than they have been for the past four years.

The lone F was for mobility, dipping from a D-minus in 2002 and 2003 and a D in 2001.

Gas prices hit an average of \$2.50 per gallon last year and that led to increases in carpooling and bus usage, reining in overall congestion levels. Yet Southern California still “consistently ranks as the most congested metropolitan region in the nation,” according to the report issued by the Southern California Association of Governments.

The region must deal with its transportation problems if it wants to compete in an increasingly “just-in-time” global economy, said Mark Pisano, SCAG's executive director.

He praised voters and the state government for working this year on blueprints to deal with the state's transportation and other problems.

Gov. Schwarzenegger in January laid out a 10-year “strategic growth plan” for the state and in November, voters passed \$37.3 billion worth of bonds to build roads, schools, housing and flood-control projects.

“The warning lights went on, and they flashed and we had a year of accomplishment that's second to none,” Pisano said. “I've never seen this degree of policy and funding progress.”

The report card showed that Southern California managed to hold its own on most indicators between 2004 and last year even though services were strained by gaining 220,000 residents, Pisano said.

However, progress in some areas was balanced by problems in others.

“We had more housing, but the housing is less affordable. We had more jobs, but the incomes are not increasing,” Pisano said.

Housing affordability reached a new low, thanks to record housing prices and large rent increases. Fewer than 15 percent of the region's households could afford a median-priced home, which has topped \$500,000, Pisano said.

Southern California gained nearly 120,000 jobs in 2005, up 1.7 percent from 2004. Those were the highest figures in five years. Fast-growing Riverside and San Bernardino counties accounted for nearly half that increase.

Southern California's unemployment rate of 5 percent was the lowest since 1988.

The downside was that workers earned less as economic changes continued to replace well-paid industrial jobs with lower-paying service industry positions.

The region also was expected to rank last in real per capita income among the 17 largest metropolitan regions in the nation.

The median household income dipped slightly to about \$52,000 after jumping 2.6 percent between 2003 and 2004.

The higher cost of living, chiefly because of steep hikes in energy and housing prices, also had an impact.

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SCAG: [www.scag.ca.gov](http://www.scag.ca.gov)